

Age of War

by TheShadowedHorizon

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Summary: A really big "What If?" story. Very very AU. Humanity was adopted into the Covenant in 2511. After 85 years of peace the Sangheili and Humans split off after issues on Installation 04. The Covenant has entered a new age, the age of war.

## 1. Backstory

\*\*Disclaimer: Blaargh wort wort. Wort wort blaargh blaargh honk.  
Blaargh Honk.\*\*

\*\*Changes have been made as I cannot think of everything the first time around.\*\*

\*\*Update 10-4-2011 â€“ "torpedo buster" missiles\*\*

\*\*Update 10-27-2011 â€“ Multiple minor wording changes in all chapters and by popular request more realistic paragraph lengths. Hope you're happy, my beta likes long paragraphs so she's pissed that pretty much everyone wants shorter paragraphs. Her literal words were, "Ya know what? If they're gonna to be pissy about paragraph length I'm not going to do anything about it. You have fun fixing them. Your story, your problem. I don't deal with nitpicky reviewers."\*\*

\*\*Update 12-12-2011 â€“ Minor wording changes, mainly it just sounding better, also tweaked weapons some to make them a bit more realistic.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Storyline Background â€“ The Covenant found the UNSC in 2511. A brief war happened then the Covenant absorbed humanity in its ranks. Humanity benefits from the technology of the Covenant, and the Covenant is boosted by the human's innovation. New weapons and ships are created. Humans make Covenant ships more powerful and efficient

with their superior knowledge of mathematics. New medical technology is introduced into the Covenant, decreasing the number of fatalities due to severe injuries. Humans make new personnel level weapons and technology, like the Brutes they are allowed to keep their technology due to its proven effectiveness, yet the standard plasma weapons are still the mainline weapons used by the Covenant. Humans and Sangheili become great allies, dealing with each other more than any other race. The new integrated Human and Sangheili fleet, Righteous Retribution, stumbles upon Installation 04 and it is observed that Humans can activate dormant Forerunner technology. Learning from 343 Guilty Spark that there is a parasitic life form called "The Flood" on the ring, and other Forerunner installations and what they did to the Forerunners the Prophets order an immediate cleansing of the Flood from the ring. The Humans and Sangheili oppose this, citing it as too risky, and that it is possible that the Flood can get off and rampage through the galaxy once again. Having learned the truth about the rings and that the Great Journey was not what the prophets said it was the Sangheili question their faith, and the leadership of the prophets. When the flood starts to rampage across the ring after a containment leak the Sangheili call for the destruction of the Forerunner artifact. The prophets refuse and murder the most outspoken Sangheili, calling them heretics. When the Humans secretly propose a plan to destroy the ring, break away from the Covenant, and search for the truth on the Forerunners, most of the Sangheili agree, swearing to avenge the blood of their brothers spilled by the prophets. Some still stay with the Covenant though, and are subsequently murdered by the brutes or thrown into prisons, creating an eternal rent between the rest of the Covenant and the Sangheili. Humans set up a prototype antimatter enhanced supernuke, codenamed SUPERNOVA, and destroy Installation 04, bringing a very angry 343 Guilty Spark with them. The prophets immediately send out fleets to attack the Human and Sangheili worlds, and the great Covenant Civil War begins, the Separatist Covenant made up of the Humans and Sangheili, while the Loyalist Covenant is made up of the Lekgolo, Unggoy, Jiralhanae, Kig-Yar, and the Yanme'e. The Huragok do not specifically choose a side, they just stay with whoever controlled the ships they were on. The year is 2596 and after 85 years of peace a new age has begun, the age of war.<p>

## New Technology

### Infantry Class Weaponry

PPR â€“ Plasma Projectile Rounds. Plasma based explosive rounds, minimum of 12.7mm size. Fired from a projectile weapon like a standard bullet, these rounds hold a small plasma charge inside of them which is set off on impact with a solid surface. Drains shields quickly and is highly effective against soft targets, yet it is nearly ineffectual against hardened reflective armor. Normally used in sidearms, usually includes SAPHE rounds in the same mag.

Penetration Rockets â€“ New rocket design that utilizes the high explosives of the old UNSC with Covenant plasma technology. Shoots out a jet of superheated plasma from the head of the rocket to soften up the target at one meter away then a tungsten penetrator head allows the rocket to break through whatever armor was not boiled away and explode in the soft insides of armored units.

MLA-4 Laser Rifle â€“ Utilizing Covenant battery technology inside of

plasma based weapons the laser rifle shoots out a literal laser beam, destroying anything in its path. Much more precise and mobile than the original shoulder fired prototype, it also holds a charge that allows for a hundred shots before the battery needs to be replaced. The best upside though is that unlike the prototype it doesn't need to be charged up first. Marksman's weapon, not as powerful as a Gauss Rifle, but its greater shot capacity allows for non-specialized use, fires in semi-automatic. Used exclusively by ODST's.

MLPL " Liquid Plasma Launcher. Very similar to a flamethrower, the LPL sends out a stream of liquid plasma over a distance of ten meters before dissipating into a gas, still can cook an unshielded enemy at a distance of fifteen meters. Due to the extreme energy output needed for this weapon it is powered by a micro reactor, which makes this very bulky. When the reactor is hit there is a very high possibility of a large explosion. It has been up to debate for years if the weapon is too unsafe for use, but its value in an urban environment greatly outweigh the risks.

MRT-2 Gauss Rifle " Using electromagnetic railgun technology to propel a slug at greater speeds than either the M99 Stanchion Rifle or the M68 Gauss Cannon. Before, railgun technology was effective yet very problematic. The immense friction caused by the projectile sliding down the rails caused them to be needed to be changed every few shots. But with new shielding technology keeping the rails from being touched it has become an incredibly powerful anti infantry and anti light armor weapon. The only downside is the semi-auto fire rate of the gun. Primarily used as a sniper.

Rifle Rocket " Just as the name suggests, it is a rocket fired from an underslung launcher. Compatible with all rifle classed weapons in the Human arsenal. Takes the place of grenade launchers, allowing for minimal penetration into armor as well. Given to infantry, allowing slight anti-armor capabilities. Multiple firing modes: guided, aimed, and air burst. Guided shots for mobile targets mean shooting the rocket into the air then using the built in laser to paint a target, or for fixed targets paint it beforehand then shoot into the air. Aimed firing is just aiming at something then shooting the rocket. Air burst is most commonly used against infantry targets, either set a distance or press a button on the launcher to send an explode signal.

### Infantry Class Armor

Personal Energy Shields " Collaboration with the Covenant allowed Humanity to come up with personal energy shielding for each soldier. Also arm shields similar to those used by jackals are common amongst the rank and file.

Hardened Reflective Armor " Specifically made for withstanding impact as well as plasma based fire. The reflective outer coating on the armor greatly reduces the effectiveness of energy weapons, and the hardened nature of it defends against projectiles as well as explosions. The standard armor for just about everything, from body armor to capitol ships.

Mark III Armor Defense System " The newest in armor technologies. Uses force multipliers to increase strength and a larger shield generator to keep the wearer safe. Wearer becomes slightly faster and on average seven times stronger. Originally just a concept meant to

transform a soldier into a one man army. The Mark I Prototype was much more expensive and had more in it, a Gatling Gun on the right arm, heat seeking missiles, a gauss cannon over the left shoulder, and explosives attached on the thigh areas of the armor. It used bubble shield technology to keep the wearer safe and had an integrated jetpack. The Mark III has none of these integrated weapon systems and uses personal energy shielding instead of bubble shield technology. The only integrated weapons are two fifteen inch long energy daggers, once located on the back of each hand. It is also smaller, allowing it to be mass produced. Although it would have been excessively expensive to make Humanity's integration into the Covenant made this factor null and void. It is the armor used by the ODST's and other special forces of the Human military. The ODST variant has a short term cloaking ability as well.

## Ground Vehicles

M-03 LRV â€“ A hovering Light Reconnaissance Vehicle. It has a mounted 20mm Metal Storm Cannon that can shoot up to 60000 Rounds Per Minute mounted on the back and energy shielding defense. Capable of exceeding speeds of 200KmPH it is used specifically for quick strikes or reconnaissance missions. Used specifically for anti-infantry roles. Gets torn apart by armor or concentrated small arms fire. Nicknamed "Guppy" for its inability to take fire.

M-18 LAV â€“ Hovering Lightly Armored Vehicle. Used for infantry backup and quick strike missions. Protected by an energy shield and a layer of hardened reflective armor. Has dual heavy plasma turrets mounted on the sides and a light energy mortar. Nicknamed "Raptor"

M-24 LT â€“ Hovering Light tank. Not much is different between a Light Tank and an LAV except a Light Tank has a small 60mm Rail Cannon instead of the light energy mortar and slightly more armor. Nicknamed "Zebra"

M-31 MBT â€“ The standard run of the mill tank used by Human forces. Has sufficiently thick armor and a reasonably powerful energy shield. Not exactly known for speed, this is meant to provide support for infantry. It is armed with a 130mm plasma cannon and two 30mm Rail Cannons. Nicknamed "Viper"

M-42 HT â€“ Made primarily for anti vehicle use and armed with a miniature energy projector. Heavily armored and shielded, meant to take a beating from other tanks and walkers. Slow and ponderous even with it hovering in the air. Secondary weapons include two coaxial tri barreled 40mm Rail Guns, and a secondary lower quad laser turret capable of destroying an unshielded light tank. The only anti-infantry weapons on the tank are two plasma turrets which must be manually controlled from the hull of the tank. Capable of being inserted from orbit. Nicknamed "Sabertooth"

M-508 TT â€“ Standard lightly armored and shielded troop transport. Meant to get troops from Point A to Point B quickly. About the size of an LAV it can hold a squad of soldiers maximum. Nicknamed "Fox"

M-517 APC â€“ Armored Personnel Carrier. Armored and shielded like an MBT this is meant to drop off two squads of soldiers into "hot zones." Armed with one 40mm Rail Cannon. The amount of armor makes up

for the general lack of mobility. Nicknamed "Hippo" for its size and general lack of speed.

M-603 BW â€“ Bipedal Walker. Being in the air provides the advantage of a better firing line against enemies. For this reason walkers were introduced even though keeping up with them can be a logistical nightmare due to the moving parts in the legs. Consists of a very heavily armed chassis and superiorly shielded as long as weak spots like knee joints aren't hit it can take some serious punishment. Armed with two 60mm Rail Cannons on short "arms" and two 40mm Rail Cannons out of the "mouth" as well as a 360° underbelly plasma turret and a medium energy mortar on the top it is meant primarily for work against infantry and light armor. Nicknamed "Mantis"

M-616 LQW â€“ Light Quadrapedal Walker. Four legs offer greater stability and maneuverability. Moderately shielded and armored it is more maneuverable than a light tank with greater survivability yet is more prone to infantry fire. Armed with a powerful Focus Cannon it is meant to fill a multirole gap in Humanity's armored units. The Focus Cannon is essentially an anti-everything gun, ravaging shields, armor, and flesh. The size of the reactor needed and firing mechanism allow for only the Focus Cannon to be mounted. Nicknamed "Spider"

M-620 HQW â€“ Heavy Quadrapedal Walker. An absolutely monstrous vehicle it has been called "a four legged platform of death" by many soldiers. Armed with a gigantic Focus cannon on the front bottom as well as a small energy projector turret on the top. Also armaments include three plasma mortars and a large 150mm 360° Rail Cannon on the undercarriage. Slow yet stable with obscene amounts of armor and insane shielding this is a battlefield superiority vehicle. Known to change the tide of a battle in the most critical moments, having one deployed is a great morale booster for troops. Must be deployed directly to the field from orbit due to the immense size.

Appropriately nicknamed "Mammoth" due to its immense size and general indestructibility.

#### Aircraft: Spacefaring and Atmospheric

M-702 F â€“ Fighter Aircraft. Meant for dogfighting, the teardrop shaped fighter uses a mixture of anti-gravity and thrust vector technology to give it unparalleled maneuverability. Shielded heavily and small it is armed only with eight forward facing laser turrets. Nicknamed "Stiletto"

M-713 I â€“ Interceptor. Arrowhead shaped craft built for speed and durability it is meant to chase down and destroy enemy bombers. Can dogfight in a pinch, relies on its greater speed due to the mix of anti-gravity generators and rocket boosters, and relies on hit and run tactics to survive. Has mediocre armor and shielding. Armed with sixteen forward facing laser turrets and two rear facing laser turrets. Nicknamed "Rapier"

M-729 B â€“ Bomber. Heavily armored and shielded it isn't particularly fast or pretty looking but it gets the job done. Armed with only four forward facing laser turrets, one 360° quad laser turret on top and two laser turrets in the back it relies on fighter escorts and armor to survive. The wedge shaped bomber can deliver a massive payload though on any target if it reaches it. Nicknamed "Claymore"

M-735 GSA " Ground Support Aircraft designed specifically for atmospheric use. Very heavily armored and shielded it is known for being able to take fire and dish it right back out, not for maneuverability. Armed to the teeth with four pulse laser turrets for self-defense, twenty 360° underbelly laser turrets, and four 120mm anti-armor Rail cannons it is a force to be reckoned with. Nicknamed "Condor"

M-747 TC " Troop Carrier. Meant to carry a maximum of two squads to a location quickly. Also able to carry nothing larger than a LAV to the drop zone. As it has light shields and mediocre armor it is not meant to drop into hot zones. Armed with one chin mounted 80mm Rail Cannon and six underbelly laser turrets it isn't that heavily armed. Nicknamed "Gull"

M-752 HTC " Heavy Troop Carrier. Very heavily armored and shielded, it drops straight into hot zones, deploying up to a companies worth of troops right into the fight. Not armed at all, just a large armored metal box with all extra power going to shields instead of energy weaponry and all space being used for troop carrying and not ammunition. Normally dropped straight from orbit into the fight. Very slow moving and rather ugly. Also can transport vehicles. Nicknamed "Penguin" as a joke, it flies so slowly that according to the troops penguins could learn to fly before a 752 could lift off.

M-761 HVT " Heavy Vehicle Transport. Similar to the Penguin but larger. Meant to carry multiple vehicles to the front lines. Nicknamed "Fat Penguin," or just "Fatso"

M-777 SOA " Single Occupant Aircraft. Built for speed and maneuverability this craft is an arrowhead shaped ground support craft. Very lightly armored with minimal shields most of the power goes to the thrusters mounted in the back. Capable of going in an excess of 3500Kmph it is meant for one thing only, hit a target and get away fast. It is armed with two lasers, giving it the ability to eventually take down even heavy armor. Nicknamed "Eagle"

### Capitol Ships

M-808 " Prowler Class ship. Built for stealth it uses photo reactive plates and engine baffles to make it blacker than the night. Armed with nothing but ten pulse lasers its best defense is stealth. Used mainly for surveillance, but can also be used to place antimatter enhanced nuclear mines in enemy ship formations. Barely armored at all and weak shields can be turned on and off. 200 meters in length.

M-817 " Corvette Class Ship. Small ship normally used for atmospheric fire support. Armed with four particle cannons and fifty particle beams. Not able to take on anything but a wounded frigate. Lightly armored and shielded. 500 meters in length.

M-824 " Frigate Class ship. Essentially a large mobile Rail Cannon. The whole ship is built around the Rail Cannon, engines in the back where the ship flares out wide then the rest of it is a narrow rectangle going for hundreds of meters with a hole in the front. Armed with the Rail Cannon and fifty pulse lasers. Lightly armored and shielded. Used mostly mainly as escort ships and mechanized infantry deployment. 1.1 Kilometer in length.

M-833 " Destroyer Class ship. Armed with two Rail Cannons and one energy projector as well as two hundred point defense pulse lasers. Medium armor, two meters thick and strong shields. 2.6 Kilometers in length.

M-841 " Light Cruiser Class ship. Armed and armored just like a destroyer but with one extra plasma torpedo launcher. Also holds a small contingent of spacecraft. 3.1 Kilometers in length.

M-855 " Heavy Cruiser Class ship. Armed with four Rail Cannons, two energy projectors, four plasma torpedo launchers, and four hundred point defense pulse lasers. Heavy armor, five meters thick and high shield strength. Carries two squadrons of fighters. 5.6 Kilometers in length.

M-862 " Battlecruiser Class ship. Armed with four Rail Cannons, three energy projectors, six plasma torpedo launchers, and six hundred point defense pulse lasers. Four meters of armor and heavy shield strength. Has immense engines. 6.3 Kilometers in length.

M-876 " Battleship Class ship. The meanest ships in the fleet. Meant to whoop up on all other capitol ships. Armed with six Rail Cannons, four energy projectors, twelve plasma torpedo launchers, one hundred particle cannons, and fourteen hundred point defense pulse lasers. The whole hull of the ship bristles with firepower. Armored like there's no tomorrow, a total of fifteen meters worth. 14.8 Kilometers in length.

M-888 " Carrier Class ship. Like all carriers it has medium armor and heavy shields. It makes up for the two meters worth of armor with multiple fighter wings stored inside the ship. Light armaments, only one Rail Cannon, two energy projectors, two plasma torpedo launchers, and 300 point defense pulse lasers. 7.9 Kilometers in length.

M-890 " Supercarrier Class ship. The largest ships ever made. Supercarriers are well armed and armored, and have shields that are tougher to crack than anything else. Five meters worth of armor and nearly indestructible shields. Armed with four Rail Cannons, four energy projectors, two hundred particle cannons, ten plasma torpedo launchers, and two thousand point defense pulse lasers. A Supercarrier is meant to carry a whole invasion force, making them vital to the invasion of a planet. 34.5 Kilometers in length.

## Naming Standards

MRT " Misriah Railgun Technologies

MLA " Misriah Laser Armaments

MPAW " Misriah Particle Acceleration Weaponry (first appearance beginning of chap. 22)

M-0 Series " Light Reconnaissance Vehicles

M-1 Series " Light Armor Vehicles

M-2 Series " Light Tank

M-3 Series â€“ Medium Tanks, AKA Main Battle Tanks

M-4 Series â€“ Heavy Tanks

M-5 Series â€“ Troop Transports/Armored Personnel Carrier: M-50 Series Troop Transport â€“ M-51 Series Armored Personnel Carrier

M-6 Series â€“ Walkers: M-60 Series Bipedal â€“ M-61 Series Light Quadruped â€“ M-62 Series Heavy Quadruped

M-7 Series â€“ Aircraft: M-70 Series Fighters â€“ M-71 Series Interceptors â€“ M-72 Series Bombers â€“ M-73 Series Ground Support Aircraft â€“ M-74 Series Light Troop Carriers â€“ M-75 Series Heavy Troop Carriers â€“ M-76 Series Heavy Vehicle Transport â€“ M-77 Series Single Occupant Aircraft

M-8 Series â€“ Capitol Ships: M-80 Series Prowlers â€“ M-81 Series Corvettes â€“ M-82 Series Frigate â€“ M-83 Series Destroyer â€“ M-84 Series Light Cruiser â€“ M-85 Series Heavy Cruiser â€“ M-86 Series Battlecruiser â€“ M-87 Series Battleship â€“ M-88 Series Carrier â€“ M-89 Series Supercarrier

All human ships carry at least twenty "torpedo buster" antimatter enhanced nuclear missiles meant to explode within a plasma torpedo and dissipate it.

Something to know about vehicles and ships. In my AU humanity will have larger vehicles than anyone else with more firepower, but will also have fewer in the fight. The whole "quality over quantity" argument. Therefore human vehicles will be much tougher and will seriously beat up on two of anything that is in the same class as them. For instance a Mammoth is approximately 50% larger than a scarab with energy shields and better heavier armor. It also has a lot more weapons. The shields are able to take a full shot from a scarab and still be up, but both the focus cannon and small energy projector can kill a scarab in one hit while the rail cannon and plasma mortars can quickly cripple a scarab and eventually kill it. For Capitol Ships Humanity has gone with "bigger is better." The ships they have are larger than those of the Covenant and can take more fire therefore as well as being able to dish out some pain. The greater tonnage of the ship the more ridiculous it gets. As in it is insane how much firepower a Heavy Cruiser on up has and Supercarriers are nearly too monstrous to be realistic. Don't expect humanity to outnumber the Covenant ships in combat like normal in the Haloverse. One the other hand expect Humanity to have better captains, admirals, etc. as well as much better ships. A Heavy Cruiser is more than a match for an Assault Carrier, depending on how the Captain plays it even two Assault Carriers and a Battleship can tear through a Covenant Supercarrier like butter. Heck, a Battleship fully charged up can tear through 20 CCS Class-Battlecruisers without a scratch. Much of the length of a Capitol Ship goes into reactor space which is needed to fire the insane number of weapons loaded on each ship. Each Capitol Ship with the exception of Frigates, Corvettes, and Prowlers has multiple reactors, a Supercarrier going as far as to have twenty reactors and a battleship eighteen. Also fighters, interceptors, and bombers are larger than their Covenant counterparts. Essentially Humanity took some steroids, created a lot of battlefield monstrosities, but are outnumbered. I can't remember which movie it was where there was a guy leading his troops against a numerically superior force and when assured his troops were better he replied,

"Yeah, but numbers help." Essentially that's what it will be here.

## Infantry Units

Fireteam = 5

Squad = 2 Fireteams, 10

Platoon = 4 Squads, 40

Company = 5 Platoons, 200

Battalion = 5 Companies, 1000

Regiment = 5 Battalions, 5000

Division = 3 Regiments, 15,000

Corps = 3 Divisions, 45,000

Field Army = 4 Corps, 160,000

Army Group = 5 Field Armies, 800,000

This is just an average; there will be differences, IE Special Forces assassination units will have less in a squad, anywhere from 4-8. On the other hand there will be none with more than what I have listed. In my AU Humanity has a tendency to overstuff their infantry units due to the sheer number of enemies they are facing. That way they can lose troops and still function as a cohesive unit.

VERY IMPORTANT NOTE: Because mendicant bias has not reactivated himself the covenant have no idea that the humans are essentially the forerunner ancestors. Therefore they were readily accepted into the ranks of the Covenant.

## 2. I Hate Running

\*\*Disclaimer: Sue me, I have negative money anyways (which means I owe a lot of people) and only a dollar in cash. My split personality, Tiny Tim, own 434 Industries. And Macrohard.\*\*

\*\*Ok, to answer my reviewers, Only two days and I've already got 3 :P And to think I'm writing this story to show other writers what not to do when they write theirs' cause I suck so bad.\*\*

\*\*Hexagonal: Thanks for the nitpick, it shows that you care. Awwwww. Even though it is going 3500, it won't be doing maneuvers at that speed, this is essentially a max speed, used to get to a target or run away. After all the SR-71A goes 3200 plus. Also I expect Humanity to have made some improvements in that area, but Halo mentions nearly nothing in canon about aircraft.\*\*

\*\*sonagod: Great to hear you're expecting epic things. So sorry I'll have to disappoint with crappy writing, I can build a universe, but not write one. And I mentioned nothing about Spartans because in my AU they don't exist. Sure, some will be mentioned about, and one will play a major role in the story but because the Covenant found

humanity the very year that all the Spartans were born (not a coincidence, I did it to quell any "because the Covenant found humanity before John was born it's possible that he wouldn't have been" bla bla bla. I really don't want to have to answer all those) there was no need for them to be "made."\*\*

\*\*Moleman171: Yes the Chief, but not as you would expect him to be. Your question is answered below, read to find out, hopefully you don't puke at how crappy my writing is. And for the "before the humans met the Covenant" see parenthetical (holy crap spell check says that is a real word!) statement above in my reply to sonagod.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Fleet Admiral John Parisa was probably Humanity's best hope of winning the war. He was just six when his family died in a tragic accident that was eventually revealed as an insurrectionist attack, and his best friend's family took him in. He also took their last name, Parisa. The moment he turned eighteen he enrolled in OCS in Luna. Due to his spectacular grades he was slotted to learn under Jacob Keys, one of the greatest tacticians of the era. He graduated top of his class and was immediately put on the bridge of the Destroyer <em>Feeling Fine</em>. In three years he was promoted to Lieutenant and given command of his own Frigate, \_Greater Good\_. A little over a year later he busted a Kig-Yar pirating ring, and was promoted to Lieutenant Commander. He then married his long time sweetheart, whom he saved from drowning at a very young age, Lieutenant Cortana Parisa. After four more years of service John was promoted to Commander and given command of the new Destroyer \_Warpig\_. After a few skirmishes with Xenophobic rebels and a victory in which he destroyed the stolen Light Cruiser \_Inconvenience\_ he was promoted to Captain at the age of 32, becoming the youngest Captain in the fleet. John proved that he was good at one thing, winning. No matter what it took and no matter how tough his enemies were he always won. Ever since he was a child he considered winning to be everything. Under Admiral Cole's guidance he became a Rear Admiral Lower Half in seven years. Five years later he led his battlegroup against a force of rebel ships that outnumbered his three to one and destroyed every last one of them whilst only losing half the battlegroup. On the way back to get repairs he was ambushed and managed to sacrifice his ship for the rest of those under his command. He was interrogated but never broke under the pressure, when the ODST's liberated him they found a body bloodied and beaten to a pulp but John's mind was as strong as ever. It took him a full year to recover from the beatings the rebels had given him and he became a figure Covenant Humans could rally behind. He was promoted directly to Vice Admiral and after more distinguished service became the youngest Admiral in history at the age of forty-three. His brilliant tactical mind eventually led him to become Fleet Admiral, affording him the highest position possible when Lord Terrence Hood stepped down. Interestingly enough in his free time he would take bits and pieces of the ODST training, citing that he wanted to be more than just a target the next time his ship got boarded. Due to the amount of time he spent in cryo at the age of sixty he was biologically still forty-five. Over a third of the time he spent in space was spent in cryo moving from one place to another. So when the Sangheili and Humanity split from the Covenant at the age of eighty-five he insisted that he felt like he was still in his fifties. Believing that you led by example he was different from most Fleet Admirals,

going into areas known to be frequented by rebel raiding parties in his personally named one of a kind Stealth Battleship, \_Too Late to Run\_. To top it all off he seemed to be the luckiest man in the whole armed forces, pulling off more close calls than anyone else. Like when the bridge of the \_Warpig\_ was breached and then a piece of bridge flooring flew up and worked like a perfect plug to the hole. John was the only survivor. Also when his ship was boarded and he was shot, his dogtags deflecting a bullet that would have hit an artery by centimeters, allowing it to go through non-vital flesh. And countless other times where sheer happenstance managed to save his life. Like when a rogue asteroid dropped out of Slipspace between the \_Greater Good\_ and the rebel destroyer, blocking the killing shot and allowing him to deliver a crippling blow to the engines of the enemy destroyer. Reality seemed to warp around John for the sole purpose of keeping him alive. John though took no pleasure in killing; instead he went about it with an air of professionalism, like it was his job to do it. The most public he was about killing was when he was hailed by a rebel leader aboard a ship he was about to destroy. When the rebel told him that his brother was killed by the former UNSC John's only reply before blasting them into oblivion was "Serves you right, you only lost one family member. I lost all of mine."

Stephen's parents agreed to it, he really didn't know why, but Kelly and Samuel had agreed. In order to understand Sangheili culture more one Thel Vandamee had offered to teach a human like he would any Sangheili child. Stephen was lucky he told himself, his mother was the fastest human ever born, running a hundred meter in less than eight seconds. And his father was huge, at six feet ten inches and weighing 135 kilos of pure muscle it was his size that allowed him to become the MMA champion of the human colonies for twelve years straight. Both of his parents were genetically superior to the rest of the Human race. Stephen had been cryogenically frozen at the age of seventeen after a horrible training accident that left him nearly dead. The Sangheili had called it "dishonorable" to have him frozen to survive and he was expelled from the program. New medical technology allowed him to be fixed up in 2595. Both of his parents were eighty-four years old, and were overjoyed to see him alive and well. Living with them was a huge change for Stephen, the last thing he remembered of them was his holochat with them just hours before he was injured. So to him it seemed like he hadn't seen them in a day, much less the forty plus years that had gone by. Thankfully he had received the genetic superiority of his parents, he was exceptionally fast, strong, and large for a human. In fact Thel expressed his surprise as to how well the human was doing in Sangheili training. His dad had taught him a good deal about hand to hand combat, and he learned how to wield weapons originally from a friend of his parents, Linda, who was the best sniper on the local SWAT team. In fact when he looked up Linda afterwards it showed her as working as a sniper instructor for special operatives. In her SWAT record it was down that she never missed a shot, no matter what the circumstances. Now at the age of eighteen and with war looming on the horizon Stephen decided to enlist in the Marines. His parents both supported his decision, citing that it was important that he follow his heart, and it is a good thing to support humanity by fighting for it. The last thing Stephen ever said to his parents was "Hey, what could go wrong? See you guys in a few months." The very next week the Covenant showed up and glassed his planet, Harvest, with his parents still on it. Then it became personal.

March 9th, 2596. Separatist controlled planet Coral.

I panted as he ran down the seemingly endless beach. I used to think that beaches were the greatest thing in the world, growing up on Harvest where so few lived near a beach. But Coral had been aptly named. It was covered in water, and the few land masses that existed were all islands. I had been running along one of many beaches for the past month. "Physical Training" my Drill Instructors called it. Even though I was fast I quickly came to realize that with his large body he was not built for endurance. At least my Sangheili training had prepared me for some of this, but the Sangheili never put any importance on running. In fact the only time I had run in the Sangheili training was running done towards an opponent. It was not the Sangheili way to run, that would be dishonorable. I decided that the next person that mentioned going to the beach would wake up the next morning missing a few teeth. "Trainees, Halt!" yelled the DI who wasn't even winded after our six kilometer run down the beach. Immediately nearly every recruit bent over, catching their breath. "Everyone get in a straight line, water will be passed out when you learn what the word straight means." All in all it took the DI fifteen minutes to pass out the water, instructing us not to drink until he said so. "Alright you maggots listen up!" he bellowed, "None of you will drink your water until we make it back to camp. You will carry your water with you the whole way back. Fall in line behind me. Move Out!"

I groaned inwardly and out loud as well as I heard the DI's instructions, that would make it a total of twelve kilometers without any water. It did explain though why we only ran six kilometers. Normally we would run eight down, hydrate, then eight back on a day like this. Apparently the DI's wanted to test us recruits. I decided that I would not fail; instead I would make it the whole way back without a drop of water. I just hoped that the rest of the recruits would do the same. Everyone knew there would be hell to pay if just one person had a drop missing from their canteen. I watched the recruits in front of me closely as my boots thudded constantly into the sand, and none of them even as much as lifted their canteens above chest level. After making it back and sitting on the ground due to near exhaustion I heard the Drill Instructor's loud voice start yelling. "Alright ladies, you have an hour to yourselves then we take a short jog! Fall Out!" Everyone sat down, tired from our run. Even though it was called a PT run it seemed more like torture.

"Man, to think that the DI's actually enjoyed the run" one of the tired recruits said.

"Well maybe not the run itself" I replied upon further reflection. "They probably were just enjoying watching us pant like a fish out of water."

"Well that too." the recruit, Brian Adams, replied before taking another swig of his water.

An hour later the DI's returned to find everyone lounging around talking and laughing. We were all promptly screamed at as the DI's had us line up and take out our canteens. "Your canteen takes six seconds to empty out if held directly upside down." the Drill Instructors informed us. "All of you who have canteens that take less than six seconds to empty out will go to the right. If it takes yours six seconds then move to the left." I was first in line and turned my canteen upside down in front of the DI, taking a full six seconds for

it to empty completely. The DI looked rather surprised that it was full still, I had made sure to not to drink a drop of it. The DI's had never said we could drink, and this was something the Sangheili made sure to pound into me. I was instructed to go to the left. Everyone else was ordered to empty theirs one at a time, every other recruit taking under four seconds, and most had empty canteens. After everyone was done I was the only person to the DI's left. He then looked straight at me and asked, "Tell me recruit, why was your canteen full when you were obviously thirsty?"

"Because you never told us we could drink out of them! Your specific orders were to not drink until you said we could! You have yet to say we are allowed to drink sir!" I smartly replied as loudly as I could without yelling.

"Exactly recruit. Now can you please explain to me why you did not influence the rest of the recruits?" I was slightly surprised by this, I figured I would be praised for following orders, but the DI seemed to be angry at me.

"Because sir, what they do is their business, not mine."

"WRONG!" he screamed right back at me, spittle flying from his mouth and his face turning a very deep shade of red. "What they do is VERY important to you! You will be in a unit, and what the rest of your unit does affects you just as much as them! If you were in a battle and you were the only one left alive because you did not try to keep the rest of your unit alive then how far do you think you would get on your own! NOT-FAR-AT-ALL!" he emphasized by jabbing his finger into my chest with each word. I just stood there saying "Yes, sir" over and over again as he ranted on and on about the importance of fighting not as an individual, but as a whole unit.

He thankfully turned his wrath to the recruits in the right hand line eventually, and then it was my turn to grin and look smugly at them from behind the DI's back. "What the hell do you think you were doing disobeying my orders, during your training I AM YOUR MASTER! You will eat when I say eat, sleep when I say sleep, and drink when I say drink!" They had all heard that before, the head DI, Sergeant Greeves, had given the new recruits the "As long as you are here I am God" speech. It really wasn't that intimidating when they did that. During the Sangheili training if you did something wrong a good beating was in order. The moment you became better than the instructor you could do whatever you wanted. Nobody had ever been able to beat Thel. So you would get beaten, and any pain you let show made you weak, and just got you beaten harder. For me it was extra bad, as a human I was physically inferior to the Sangheili, when they hit it did more, when I got kicked hard it was likely to break a bone. Thanks to the medical technology I could heal up within a week, but it still hurt like hell. I came out of my thoughts just in time to hear the DI finish up "and if any of you sissies ever disobey me again you will have KP duty, latrine duty, and any other annoying or disgusting thing I can come up with for the rest of the time you are here! Is that understood?" "Sir, Yes Sir!" every recruit shouted back. "Alright everyone get behind me, we're running the beach again. And Edwards!"

"Sir?" I questioned.

"Get hydrated and then catch up, I want you with us by the time we

reach the eight kilometer mark."

"Yes, sir!" I inwardly groaned as I moved to the nearest spigot to refill my canteen. I quickly drank as much as I dared before running, then refilled it again so I would have something for the run, it was sneaky and probably against the rules but the DI hadn't forbidden it. I then started my run towards the beach, I would have to catch up by the eight kilometer mark or I knew there would be hell to pay. After about six kilometers of mind numbing jogging I swallowed the last of my water and picked up the pace, I could see the rest of the recruits a few hundred meters in front of me. I barely made it, I had sprinted over the last two hundred meters, being the second to last to show up. I lay down on the sand and panted. The DI raised his eyebrow at me, probably not expecting me to be able to make up the two kilometers that the group probably had on me. My legs had burned like fire for the last two kilometers, but the Sangheili training had come through for me, pain was weakness, a true warrior pushed it aside and finished the job before he would ever admit to being wounded. We were all thankfully given water and then ordered to run back to camp. Anyone who wasn't in the mess hall by 1915 would not get anything to eat. Man I hated running.

As if running normally wasn't bad enough for the next whole month we had to do it with full packs on. Thankfully though we were allowed to move slower, even though we were at times expected to go in an all out sprint. I usually was the first one to finish those. I was starting to get used to it though, get up, do "morning calisthenics," run, come back and eat, go out and run some more, come back and eat, free time, then lights out by 2100. At least it wasn't as bad as the very beginning; they even gassed us, a "tradition" that led back to the old 21st century military. We would all file into a gas chamber then would be forced to recite the Soldier's Creed. I got as far as "I am a Separatist soldier." before I started coughing and choking on the gas. It burned all the skin that it touched. A very unpleasant experience, but an experience none the less. Today was to be something new though, so I followed the DI to the "Kiddie Playground." It looked more like a jungle gym on roids. I had been through worse before; the Sangheili had obstacle courses set up that made this look like it really was a playground. And I managed to make it through those alive. It was a mess of cargo nets, monkey bars, walls, razor wire, and mud pits. "You will have fifteen minutes to get to the end of this obstacle course. If it takes you more you will do it again. If you still fail you will do it again. If you fail again then you will pick up KP duty for a month. You will start off by doing ten push-ups, ten sit-ups, then ten pull-ups before you even start the course. I will be watching, so don't you dare do less than ten apiece. GO!"

The moment I heard him yell go I immediately dropped down and started counting off the way we had been taught at the beginning of our training. "1, 2, 3, 1. 1, 2, 3, 2. 1, 2, 3, 3. This, is what, you asked, 4. 1, 2, 3, 5." until I got to ten. I then did my sit-ups, and pull-ups. I was the first one done so I immediately started breezing through the course. While I may not have been particularly good or happy at endurance running; strength, speed, and coordination were what I excelled at. Which is exactly what it took to get through a military obstacle course. It also didn't hurt that the Sangheili had their young at only ten years of age run a course slightly harder than this. I came in with a time of six minutes and nine seconds, a record for any new recruit, and nearly breaking the course record of

five minutes fifty-seven seconds. The DI looked at me with some interest when he clocked me in at such a fast time, obviously seeing that there was more to me than what he knew. I would probably be able to go through it fifteen seconds faster the next time. After all, the Sangheili had trained me for five years, making year long boot camp records obsolete. What I couldn't wait for though was when they were going to "train" me in hand-to-hand combat and the use of weapons. Five years with a warrior society did wonders for the CQB abilities of a person as well as their ability to handle nearly any kind of weapon. Half of the recruits had to do it over again, the next fastest one clocking in at a little over twelve minutes. Only fifteen recruits had to do it a third time, and one poor recruit, Jimmy, was given KP duty as he finished three seconds too late.

I started to become rather popular in the barracks after that, everyone wanting to know how I was able to do the course so fast. Not really wanting to disclose my past, I just told them that my father had been in the military and as a kid I had tried the obstacle courses thinking them to be a bit of fun. They accepted my story, and I made it clear that I was uncomfortable talking about my past as it brought up bad memories and the fact that they had been on Harvest when it was glassed. Sure some memories were bad, but that was just a lie. And really Harvest being glassed with them on it wasn't something I was loathe to talk about either, it gave me the fuel needed to feed my rage for the Covenant Loyalists. I really just didn't want people digging to find out that I had been cryo frozen for over four decades after an accident during the Sangheili training I was receiving. I just wished that I could become a marine quickly so that I could avenge their deaths. I sighed as I went to sleep for the night, maybe the tomorrow would have something more interesting in store than just the basics that I already knew.

Separatist Battleship Too Late to Run, Slipspace, en route to Separatist colony world, Arcadia

"Dropping out of Slipspace in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Mark." Navigation Officer Lieutenant Annemarie Kidd announced as the Too Late to Run transitioned back to normal space.

"Good, Ops, I want us running dark, initiate cloak once blackline levels have been achieved. We are to attack the Covenant from behind when they get here. Navigation, move us away from the fleet and near the edge of the system." John's orders were followed immediately, he had handpicked his bridge crew, they were professional and quick, nobody made mistakes and the hull had yet to be hit with them aboard. The bridge lights dimmed, and the reactors all spun down to under 15% output.

"Blackline levels achieved, initiating cloak." the Operations officer, Jacob Daniels announced. Cloaking systems were very expensive and highly specialized, they were only put on a few ships, not even Prowlers had them. They were normally used in Special Operations deep space insertion ships. But John had used his considerable authority and minuscule political pull get one installed in his state of the art Battleship.

"Weapons how are the capacitors doing?"

"Holding steady at 100%, synching with navigation to lower reactor outputs even further." The Weapons Officer Terrence Howell replied.

The capacitors were a very new and important part of all new ships. They were meant to hold enough power for every weapon in the ship to be fired once, allowing ships running dark to still have emergency offensive capability as well as allowing all weapons to be fired twice in quick succession to end a battle quicker. The rest of the battlegroup fanned out and began to orbit over Arcadia, some docking with the orbital defense platforms. Prowlers went dark and moved towards the outer fringes of the system, prepared to lay antimatter enhanced nuclear mines into the path of the Covenant ships. That would make thirty-three ships, thirty if you discounted the prowlers, against an estimated fleet of one hundred Covenant ships inbound, with an expected two enemy supercarriers. John was pretty sure that they had this one in the bag already, after all his battleship could take on twenty enemy cruisers and come out without a scratch even without the cloaking. It was too bad there were only three total made, and even sadder that there were only four supercarriers. Naval fleets were not something that the United Human Colonies were particularly interested in building. No matter, he had enough to win the fight, wishing for more powerful ships would do him no good if he was assured of a victory.

### 3. Sucker Punch

\*\*Disclaimer: See the one in the Backstory chapter for full details.\*\*

\*\*Review time yay. All it does is take up space and make me feel like I'm contributing. I do reviews as they come in so the times will be inconsistent with all of them.\*\*

\*\*Hexagonal: Yep it's picking up slowly but surely. And sorry about the whole "wall of text" thing, I'll try to make more paragraphs. Sorry about the long chapters too, I want people to have time to read it in between my updates. I kinda get bored though and spend two hours writing and come out with 3000 words. It then goes to my beta, who fixes it and sends to my gamma, who makes suggestions for additional things he would like to see. I then end up adding anywhere from 600-1200 words before my beta reads it again and fixes more. I updated like two and a half hours ago and chap 2 is currently being fixed up by my beta.\*\*

\*\*Legionary Prime: Yes he is. Because he was never abducted into the Spartan program he stayed where he was and followed through on his promise. If you want to know the structure to it then read Evolutions, if you have then my explanation is for all those who haven't, please don't take it as if I'm lecturing you. All my replies are for both the benefit of the reviewer and the readers. Her last name was Parisa, and because I am saying his parents died when he was young and her family took him under their wing he took her name when they eventually married.\*\*

\*\*HURRRK BLARGGHHH: Yeah, formatting is an issue for me. My beta likes long paragraphs and I only use my gamma to add extra stuff in as he knows absolutely nothing about writing a story, but in my opinion has some pretty interesting ideas. For this one he literally said, "You should have like, that epic stealthy ship thingy charge into the middle of the enemy ships with guns blazing then have it fire like a billion nukes and turn them all into atomized pieces." I thought it was a great idea; I was originally just going to have the

Separatist fleet wipe them out from range. My beta finds his idea unrealistic though so my gamma came up with a reason for survival that will be explained next chapter.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>April 7th, 2596 Separatist controlled planet Coral</p>

The annoying sound of the alarm clock woke the whole barracks up. Thanks to George Rembert accidentally hitting it with something heavy (he wouldn't tell any of us what) it now made a kind of broken electronic noise akin to static mixed with a loud drone. It was the most annoying sound I had ever heard. I was never a morning person, but we had to be at the mess hall by 0630 or we wouldn't be getting breakfast. "Would somebody please shut that damn clock up?" one of the recruits shouted, and inwardly I agreed. Seconds later the sound stopped, and we all got up. I put on my combat boots, green monochrome fatigues, and walked out in time to see the sun rise up over the water. Say whatever you want about the heat of Coral and how annoying it was to get up early, sometimes the sunrise made it all worth it. The shades of orange and pink in the sky as the sun continued to rise up out of the water. It was moments like these that reminded me that all the training I was going through was to protect this for the civilian populace. Pride for what I was doing swelled up in my chest as I walked along the sand towards the mess hall. At 0630 we all had to stop eating, scrape the leftovers into an "uneaten food" bin where it would be broken down into its various nutrients and then formed into a paste to be used in long term field operations to keep soldiers nourished, and then stack our trays in the large container by the door.

I made my way outside and formed up with the rest of my barracks for our morning workout, which generally consisted of push-ups, sit-ups, jumping-jacks, and whatever else the DI's could come up with to make our lives miserable. One day we had to acquire fifteen total minutes each in a perfect wall-sit position. That really made the run afterwards unpleasant. Supporting my 6'6" 115 Kilogram frame with just my legs at a 90 degree angle to the wall was excessively painful. They also had us do something they called "suicides," where you would run five meters, stop, then go back, run ten meters, stop, then go back, run fifteen meters, stop, then run back, then finally twenty meters before you started all over again at five meters. The starting and stopping made that exercise particularly difficult. As we did our morning hour of exercises, which were all basic thankfully, I wondered what we were going to be doing today. The DI's wouldn't go easy on us in the morning unless there was something important planned for later on in the day. We all then jogged over to a part of the camp we hadn't been in yet. As a DI opened a door into a chain link cage I grinned as I figured out exactly what we were going to be doing today. I cracked my knuckles, this was going to be fun.

Sergeant Greeves was the man we were going to have to test our skill against. The first poor sap up was Jimmy, he was such a skinny little guy, he wasn't fast, strong, or particularly good at anything so far other than being the best endurance runner out of all of us. They had probably picked him to be first for this reason, to scare all the other recruits that were going to go up. Sergeant Greeves immediately dropped down into a crouch, bent his knees, resting his weight on the balls of his feet, and turned his body perpendicular to Jimmy's. Poor

Jimmy on the other hand was flat footed, stiff, and faced his whole body towards Sergeant Greeves. Greeves just said two words, "hit me." It was over before Jimmy knew it, he had attempted to throw a right jab, and Greeves spun along the length of his arm, grabbing it just above the elbow, moved his other arm to hold Jimmy's left the same way and then swept his legs out from under him, planting a knee in Jimmy's back once he was down. "Pathetic" he said loud enough for the rest of the recruits to hear. "Who's next?" one of the larger recruits, George, walked up to him and assumed the same stance that Greeves had, but he was obviously just imitating him. Poor George wound up flat on his back with the wind knocked out of him complaining about cheating after Greeves planted a kick right into his lower chest. "Cheat? I didn't cheat. You have four limbs recruits, learn to use all of them. Next!" I wanted to be up last, I wanted to have the last shot at Greeves, and hopefully lay the hurt on him some. So for the next hour and fifteen minutes I got a show. After people had stopped volunteering they started calling off names in reverse alphabetical order. Thankfully everyone with a last name beginning with an A-D had gone already, so I was slated to go last. I figured that Sergeant Greeves would want to make an example of the last recruit to go up against him. There would be an example all right, but the only person setting an example would be me. Then it was my turn up in the cage, the last one, and to top it off I was the biggest recruit, standing eight inches taller than Greeves and outweighing him by at least thirty-five kilos.

As I walked in I could see the rest of the recruits on the other side nursing bruises and such, all of them cheering for me. They really wanted to see Greeves go down after the beating that he had laid on them all. Greeves had a slight grin on his face, as if he knew that he was sure to win. Even though he was smaller he presumed that he had more training, and superior training at that. Little did he know I had been trained by Sangheili, the masters of hand-to-hand combat. They had spent millennia of their existence perfecting the art, and it was taught the same way it had been thousands of years ago. I had spent five grueling and painful years learning under them. As Sergeant Greeves adopted his stance I bent into a Sangheili battle stance. Greeves eyes went wide at this, he obviously recognized my awkward looking crouch for what it was and I grinned slightly at him before launching myself forwards into a weak right hook. Greeves started to duck under it then threw himself backwards as I continued my rotation with a sweeping kick I kept in just a little short. I didn't know what kind of countermoves that Greeves knew, so I wasn't about to give him a golden opportunity to surprise me with something I had never seen before. I then used his own words against him as I stood there and waited "hit me." He came on at a measured pace, throwing half-strength punches and kicks which I all dodged. "Comon, you're going to have to be faster than that" I taunted him. I could hear the rest of the recruits roar in approval at my taunting, they had seen enough of Sergeant Greeves and wanted him taken down. Greeves then came on full force, starting with a left jab that I sidestepped then a low right hook that I stepped away from, his knuckles catching the fabric of my fatigues. When he launched a kick at me I braced myself and then literally stopped his kick in midair before jerking him towards me with my left arm and sending my fist crashing into his gut with my right. Greeves managed to land a punch in on me, but compared to the hit a Sangheili could give it was nothing. He doubled over and I brought my knee up into his chest, standing him right back up. Just to rub it in I flicked him in the nose. Greeves stumbled away gasping for breath and the recruits were

silent for a moment before cheering for the hurt I had just laid down on the head DI. I wasn't done though and sprinted towards Greeves, ready to give the knockout blow but then he launched a punch right at my face that I was not expecting. Thanks to my mother Kelly I had a faster reaction time than any human should have, and it was decreased even more by the adrenaline flowing through my body at this moment. It took me a full three and a half tenths of a second to start dodging the punch. I leaned my head back and dropped to my knees, feeling Greeves' fist impact on my forehead snapping my head backwards before I bodily crashed into him.

I immediately knew I was at a disadvantage. Unlike me Greeves had been trained extensively in wrestling and knew all kinds of holds that I barely got out of. The only wrestling I had learned came from my father. The Sangheili didn't teach that. An honorable warrior stood and took the hits. Whoever was left standing was the winner. He almost had me when I got on top of him and was about to beat my fists into his face until he pulled his legs around my neck and left arm in a triangle, but I managed to use my superior reach to bring send my right fist crashing up into his chin, weakening his hold. I pushed up and away from him, getting back to my feet where I had the advantage. He had a greater knowledge of submission moves and wrestling than I did, but in a straight up fight I was faster, stronger, and could take more hits. He got up as well and when I went to kick him he barely sidestepped then pulled me off balance towards him. As I went down he hit me right in the nose, breaking it but I grabbed his arm, pulling him with me. With my other arm I grabbed one of his legs then bodily lifted him up over my head and threw him into the fence with a yell. The DI's watching to make sure nobody killed someone stopped the match after that. I walked out of the sparring area with a broken nose, a few bruises, and a feeling of pride and accomplishment. I had just established that I was not somebody you wanted to mess with.

To explain away my ability to beat up on Sergeant Greeves I attributed it to the Sangheili friend that my mother had made while visiting their homeworld teaching me some basics of their fighting style and years of king of the hill as a kid, learning to take a hit without any adverse effects. There was nearly nothing on file for me, the UHC didn't want word about me getting out apparently so up until I was unfrozen there were no records on me, and it stated the my parents had really been foster parents after I had been picked up off the streets. I was getting kind of tired of people asking me about my past. Why couldn't they just let the past be the past and agree that I would make an excellent soldier no matter what my past had been? They said they needed to be suspicious due to rebels trying to infiltrate UHC forces and cause havoc. I could understand and respect that, but I just wished that they would stop prying into who I was. Over the next few weeks we were taught hand-to-hand combat, and I was specifically taught "execution moves" by Sergeant Greeves. He respected me as a great fighter, but knew that I had a weakness when it came to anything other than beating on people with my limbs.

After we were done with hand-to-hand we were taught to fight with knives and any other weapon and how to defend ourselves. I once again was better than even the instructors when it came to wield a knife. In fact I could hit a moving target from twenty five meters with a well balanced knife. As I continued my training I learned that humans cared not at all about the honor that Sangheili were all about. In fact if you could win without honor then that was preferable, best to

kill an enemy quickly and without a sound. Word had gotten out about me beating Sergeant Greeves and I became the most popular recruit almost overnight. My ability to fight due to my previous experience training with the Sangheili had the other recruits pretty much lining up for me to teach them what they didn't know. Needless to say nearly every recruit owed me at least two favors, so if I ever needed something then all I would have to do was ask. Eventually we were split into five teams. A, B, C, D, and me and Jimmy together. I think the DI's really noticed that I was better than all of the other recruits at anything but running. I still hated running. Each team got a score based on how well they did that week, and the team with the highest score got double rations for dinner. I tried my hardest but teaching Jimmy was nearly impossible. He couldn't do anything except for run. It was really annoying that he just wouldn't learn. I tried to teach him hand-to-hand combat but he had an inability to learn. I eventually gave up on him. He would probably end up dying within the first few minutes of his first deployment. Apparently I was supposed to teach him or else I would end up never winning. Jimmy was too jumpy for anything, he freaked out at loud noises and looked like the consummate nerd. I sighed, as long I was with him I would just have to deal with it.

John watched the empty space as he waited for the Covenant fleet to arrive. Ten more cruisers and five destroyers had trickled in, the ships of Task Force Omicron. If the Covenant fleet took any longer to show up then Battle Group Delta would show up in thirty-two hours and bring along their thirty three ships. Each Battle Group was led by either a Battleship or a Supercarrier. Delta had a Supercarrier leading it, meaning that if the Covenant got the chance to land any troops on the surface of Arcadia they would be pretty much screwed. Marine Naval Fleet Alpha was also on the way, they would arrive in seven hours, bringing along with them their five Colony Class Ships, fifty kilometers long and covered with point defense guns they were not meant for combat but for the deployment of troops along the surface of a planet. They were monstrous floating bricks in space, the ships technically belonged to the marines, and a Brigadier General was on every ship, but it was crewed by naval personnel. Each ship had the ability to deploy a hundred thousand Marines to any point on a planet within three hours. A little under half of the 700,000,000 UHC Marines in existence were at any given point in time in cryostasis on one of the three thousand Colony Class Ships. Planetary defense was normally left up to the army, and any Marines that happened to be in the area doing training exercises. John had it set up that way so that any given planet could have a force of a million Marines on the surface within twenty hours, and twenty million within a week. The 1,000,000 total ODST's operated off of one of the five converted Stealth Carriers. They had been stripped of all offensive weapons, reactors had been taken out, and the gear for the ODST's had been transported in. One was actually on the way, It would take a week to show up though. Other ships were going to show up as well. John had finally gotten it through the thick heads of ONI that Arcadia was the next target. He was expected to receive a third Battle Group, four more Task Forces, and ten Strike Groups. What John really wanted out of those were the Strike Groups. Consisting of eight frigates and two carriers they moved fast, hit with precision, then got the hell out of Dodge. That would put around half of the human fleet in orbit around Arcadia, a total of two hundred and eighty ships out of six hundred overall. What John wanted most though was one of the two Experimental Weapons Fleets. They were armed with the new antimatter enhanced nuclear Rail Cannon rounds, essentially

boosting the effectiveness of Rail Cannons by five against shields. In theory of course. In simulations they were safe but the magnetic rails could mess with the magnetic antimatter containment fields and blow the whole thing up in the barrel. As it was though normal Rail Cannon rounds were good for nothing except for finishing off an enemy ship with its shields down. Firing a Rail Cannon was the same as firing the bullet to the head of a wounded enemy. On top of that they were supposed to have a new prototype superlaser, but that was not supposed to be tested unless as a last resort. And then as a kicker they were supposed to have new reactors that not only boosted power and therefore shield strength and lessened weapon charge times but also allowed for the production of more plasma, meaning the standard plasma torpedo launchers would be upgraded to plasma lances. In theory a frigate in one of those fleets was a match for his battleship in a slugfest.

August 12th, 2596, Space near Separatist Controlled Planet Arcadia

Four months. John slammed his fist down on the arm of his command chair. Four bloody months and the Covenant hadn't as much as dropped by to scream heretic then jump back into Slipspace. Four months of doing nothing but waiting. Four months of "Sir, probes have picked up a large mass moving in our direction, most likely it's the Covenant fleet. Wait sir, beta probe picks up two masses." Everyone in the bridge paused as the communications officer, Vicky King, relayed the news from the station. "Two more masses have shown up, Delta probe is transitioning back, receiving intel! Sir! Four large masses followed by one gigantic one, looks like someone is being chased. All signatures come up as Covenant standard, ships in the larger mass are pinging possible Jiralhanae controlled."

"Order all Prowlers to set up minefields where the larger mass is to transition back to normal space. Have all ships form up into Battle Line Alpha, prime all weapons and remove all safeties."

"Orders sent sir, all ships acknowledge, forming into battle formation."

"Navigation, move us behind where the larger mass will exit, but don't put us in the fire line of our ships. Comms, open up a channel to the largest ship in the Covenant fleet when they arrive. I want them to know they're dead."

"Aye sir." Both Annemarie and Vicky replied.

"Ops bring us up to the blackline, be prepared to disengage cloak and bring all reactors up to 100% on my mark. Weapons start charging weapons as much as possible while keeping our cloak."

"Yes sir." Terrence and Jacob responded. The bridge became a bustle of activity as John's orders were followed to the letter.

"Blackline achieved, commands keyed into the computer, awaiting your mark." Jacob said.

Terrence was next, "Weapons all running at 100% charge, capacitors fully charged, excess energy is currently being used to heat waste for possible smokescreen."

"Position reached sir, holding until further orders." Annemarie piped in.

"Good" John said. "Vicky, see if you can get anything more specific on that larger mass. Numbers, ship types, hell, get me which side they're on while you're at it too."

"Larger mass is definitely Covenant estimated five hundred ships, smaller masses are Sangheili vessels, fifty per wave. Sangheili ships should transition a minute before the Covenant arrives. Should I attempt contact with Sangheili vessels as they transition to realspace?"

"Yes, let's see if we can get them to join the line and add their firepower to ours. We could use all the help we can get. And that would put us numerically even as well." Another two minutes passed before the first set of Sangheili ships transitioned out of Slipspace. Leading them was an Assault Carrier slightly larger than normal. John hailed the Fleet Master and got him to form up in a line with the UHC ships. Firing areas were picked out and AI's were linked to allow for better accuracy. The Separatist fleet was ready, now it was just a matter of the Covenant showing up on their doorstep.

Space boiled as five hundred Covenant ships emerged from Slipspace near Arcadia. Four hundred and eighty Separatist ships stood between them and their goal of glassing the planet. The first move was made by the Separatists. John's face appeared on the screen of the Covenant flagship "Go back to hell you alien bastards." The connection was cut and immediately over a hundred Zeus antimatter enhanced nuclear mines went off in the midst of the Covenant fleet. Half a second later every one of the ships in the Separatist fleet opened fire. The Covenant fleet charged weapons and did the same. Every human ship fired all their guns twice within five seconds, and explosions could be seen all over the Covenant line. Nearly half the plasma torpedoes dissipated into nothingness on their way to the defensive line, the other half hitting and making shields shimmer. Then the second, and third, and fourth waves of plasma torpedoes hit in quick succession. Shields shimmered even brighter and some smaller Sangheili ships exploded under the constant fire, the Human ships weathering the storm. Another volley was launched from the Separatist line then every ship broke formation and pursued individual targets. The remaining Covenant ships advanced as well, leaving a full three quarters of their number behind. "3, 2, 1, Mark!" John shouted from the bridge of his battleship. "Weapons pick your targets and fire at will!" The Battleship \_Too Late to Run\_ appeared out of thin air firing every weapon it had at the ships in the Covenant fleet, all reactors running at 100%. Energy Projectors lanced out and Rail Cannon rounds streaked across space as within the first ten seconds Humanity's Flagship had scored fourteen kills.

The Covenant ships were caught completely off guard and were sluggish to respond to a single ship attacking them from behind. The remaining Covenant ships started launching every single ship, boarding craft, and dropship they had at the closing Separatist fleet. "Sir, capacitors drained, relying on reactor power only. Fire rate has been decreased by sixty percent." It didn't matter at that point anyways though. John's ship was charging straight into the enemy line, even taking a stray Rail Cannon round to the shields, spitting death at all nearby ships from point blank range. The shields started to drain

as they took hits from multiple plasma torpedoes.

"Shields at ninety two percent and dropping." Jacob reported.

"Weapons target the enemy supercarrier and blow them to hell." John ordered. The Battleship turned and pointed every gun it had at the supercarrier, which fired both its energy projectors and twelve plasma torpedo launchers in vain as it was destroyed in seven seconds. All four energy projectors lanced out to finish the job that the twelve plasma torpedo launchers had started. The \_Too Late to Run\_ turned and fired all six of its Rail Cannons at the nearest Assault Carrier, destroying its already weakened shields and shattering it under the impact of three rounds.

"Shields fifty six percent and dropping!"

"We're in the middle of their fleet now, fire all nukes three hundred sixty degree spread, I want them atomized! Set to detonate at 1000 kilometers! Fire now!"

"Firing sir, nukes away."

"Run a solution for out nuclear countermeasures, I want one fired at every ship within the blast radius of those nukes. Use all leftovers to shoot at the ships near us."

"Aye sirâ€|done, ready to fire on your mark. All main weapons and Capacitors are back to full charge."

"Good, divert all power to maintaining the shields, how are they doing Lieutenant?"

"Twelve percent and dropping at a rate of one percent per second, charging at a rate of one percent per one point two seconds." The nukes exploded, obscuring the whole of the Covenant fleet from the rest of the Separatists, who had mostly stopped firing due to the Battleship tearing through the midst of the remains of the Covenant fleet.

"Fire all countermeasures now!"

"Done."

"Load heavy rounds into the point defense guns, it's time to go hunting."

"Aye sir, rounds loaded." The countermeasures reached their targets and exploded, wiping out thirty of the remaining forty-three Covenant ships. The rest had their shields dropped.

"Shields at two percent, imminent collapse sir!"

"Fire all primary weapons at the furthest ships and all PD guns at the closest, I want this battle over now."

"Acquiring solutionsâ€|done, weapons firing."

It was rather poetic, as the light and flares from the nuclear devices faded the \_Too Late to Run\_ could be seen spinning in space,

shooting streaks of white, purple, and gold light into the enemy ships left surviving, making them explode into large crackling blue fireballs. The shields around it shimmered a very bright and brilliant silver as they were on the verge of collapse. The PD guns could be seen firing streams of fire into multiple ships, and the pulse lasers shooting purple bolts into nearby single fighters. The last Covenant ship blew up and the weapons of the Too Late to Run went quiet. John turned to his bridge crew and grinned, "I'm willing to bet a thousand credits that my wife lectures me for over sixty seconds once she sees videos of that go out to the public."

Terrence grinned back, "You're on, I bet a minute and a half if you show her the whole thing."

"Nah, only forty-five seconds." Jacob countered.

"I've got something even better" Vicky quipped, "I bet Two Thousand credits that my husband cusses John out when he sees the video." The bridge was silent.

"Sorry Vicky, looks like once again you don't have any takers on that one." John laughed, "I wonder if I'm going to get the "Humanity needs heroes not Martyrs" speech or the "I'm so worried how could you do that to me?" speech."

"Both." Annemarie replied, "And three minutes. Minimum. Let's say you take away 500 if it's under five and throw in an extra 500 if it's over."

"You've got a deal." John agreed.

#### 4. A New Feeling

\*\*Disclaimer: Remember the disclaimer in Chapter 2? Well now I'm up to \$3. Still owe people though. Mainly the people that fixed my car.\*\*

\*\*sonagod: You are enjoying it? Really? You must be in waste management to like so much crap. I know I diss my writing but I really feel like I don't write that well. If I did write well then I would be rich with multiple books published. And I'd have a car with a real paint job. And a working High Pressure Power Steering Hose.\*\*

\*\*Prototron MJ Tornada: So you like the take on Halo? Cool. You didn't say anything about liking the writing so you must be telling the truth. And tell Kachaan that I accept the duelâ€|as long as it's over XBL. And tell him that the things said, were obviously taken incorrectly, I obviously meant for the third word to be stressed at the end, not the beginning. It is so hard to convey stresses in type.\*\*

\*\*RamenKnight: Well even if you said you won't be reading I'll still respond. I have greatly shortened the paragraph lengths, they are now in the opinion of my beta "kindergarten length" but hopefully more manageable for the readers. And I do agree with you, you said that people who have long paragraphs suck at writing, and in my opinion I do suck at writing.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>For seven minutes John had sat down and listened to his wife lecture him for seven minutes on the importance of him in her life, how he needed to be more careful, and how he would be best off to humanity alive. After watching the videos he had to admit that he had been lucky. Only six Covenant ships targeted him, and every one of those was a frigate. If anything else had decided to take potshots at him the shields wouldn't have held and Humanity's Flagship would probably be molten slag. After he had mentioned losing a bet, he had been screamed at for the next fifteen, his wife indignant about the fact that he was betting on how long she would lecture him after seeing the video of the battle. John reminded himself to get her some roses for the next time he saw her. The last thing he needed was for her to stay angry at him. Especially with a two week leave that he had planned coming up soon. He turned off the holoscreen, telling his wife that he loved her and citing that he needed to go to debriefing. She "hmmphed" and turned off her end.</p>

Her time spent in the Marines had given her the kind of attitude when she was angry that could make most grown men run away screaming for their mothers. It was a good thing that nothing fazed John. She used to threaten that she could beat him to a bloody pulp if he did something to upset her but his time spent in ODST training had made that threat groundless. John actually did have a debriefing to go to that he wasn't particularly quick to go to. He really didn't like them. He wanted what happened to stay that way, if ONI wanted some information then all they had to do was watch what happened and analyze it. If they wanted his opinion then they could ask politely and he would write a report for them. But no. He had to go to a stupid debriefing where he would be grilled on what he thought of the Covenant tactics, and how he thought the battle had gone. They had fought beside the Covenant for years and now they would ask him how they worked. Idiots only had to just ask some random frigate captain, even a marine looking at the video and comparing it to normal Covenant tactics could tell they were the same. But John knew he would be in serious trouble with ONI if he didn't go. Also he had his air of complete professionalism to keep up for the rank and file.

John walked out of his quarters and outside to the M-03 that was waiting to transport him to the briefing room. The man behind the wheel greeted him, "Fleet Admiral, sir." "Private" he responded with a nod of his head. He climbed into the passenger seat and the guppy took off. The Private on the gun kept his eyes on the sky looking to make sure that nothing would catch them by surprise. After all the protection of the most important human commander was his duty. It took all of two minutes for the guppy to make it to the underground bunker designated as the briefing room. John got out and walked over to the "EB Green" colored bunker, it looked no different from the rest of the scattered bunkers throughout the base. He walked through the automatic blast doors and into the bunker, moving to an inconspicuous spot on the wall and walking straight through it. Once on the other side he took the elevator going down and walked out into the brightly lit room where four guards stood ready. After nodding to them John took a moment to collect himself and walked into the debriefing room.

It was dark, not just dimly lit dark but people were no more than vague shapes dark. There was a long table and around it sat multiple

figures dressed in black. Why they had to dress in black in a dark room John didn't know, but he briefly entertained the thought of all of them having to get up at once and tripping over each other. One of the men close to the back left corner spoke up "So in your opinion how did the battle go?" "Well enough" John replied, "twenty-two Sangheili ships lost, all frigates, and only two casualties for us, both damaged frigates, no deaths. Could have been worse, could have been better. It's a good thing the Sangheili showed up otherwise we would have sustained a couple losses." "And what about your suicidal charge into the Covenant lines?" another shadowy figure asked, this one a female. "I've already answered this question. I know you're going to look at the conversation I had with my wife that you recorded to see if there is any information I would tell her but not you. Get your answer there, I don't like having to repeat myself. I know how your ilk work." Murmurs of shock could be heard around the table, obviously the spooks were not used to being spoken down to. In John's opinion they needed it. "I think your rank is getting to your head \_Fleet Admiral\_" one of the figures replied with thinly veiled anger, stressing John's rank and managing to say it with disdain all at the same time. "Possibly" John replied, "Or maybe it's just me refusing to play nice until you do as well. You give me your respect and I will give you mine." More angry murmurs, this time they were louder and obviously the spooks were talking amongst themselves. After a few more seconds another question was shot at John "How were the Covenant tactics compared to what we know of them?" "Same as always, they focus too much on one thing at a time to be effective in combat, hence me being able to essentially tear through their fleet with just one ship. They were too focused on destroying the rest of our fleet than destroying my ship. If you even bothered to look at the video logs you could see that." John couldn't help but throw one last jab in, "If you really want to know more then go ask someone who wasn't in danger for the majority of the battle." A sigh could be heard from one of the officers, "It's obvious that you don't want to cooperate with us Fleet Admiral, we can probably get one of the two captains of the frigates that were damaged if you insist on being obstinate. "If you insist on questioning me like a child then I will answer like one that isn't getting their way. Now does that mean I am free to leave this pointless debriefing or must you ask more questions that can be answered by looking at the recording?" "By all means, take your leave Fleet Admiral" one of the voices responded, one that John recognized as Admiral Mark Gander. John walked back out of the room, squinting at the sudden brightness of light and passed back by the four guards again, taking the elevator up and out. He needed a nap, he hadn't slept in the last thirty-two hours.

September 28th, 2096, Separatist controlled planet Coral

Breakfast was abnormally good in the morning. You always knew the Drill Instructors had something particularly horrible for you when they fed you well. We actually had a full hour to eat. And eat we did, bacon, sausage, biscuits and gravy, eggs, and even toast. It was almost as if the cooks felt sorry for us knowing what we would have to go through later. "So what do you think the demonic idiots have cooked up for us today?" I queried the rest of my table, waving my improvised bacon sandwich around in the air with one hand. It was a delicious way to eat toast and bacon, my father had loved it and every Friday my mom had made them. Just stick eight crispy pieces of bacon in between two pieces of toast and it was delicious. Some of the other recruits had even tried it and agreed with me. "Probably

more running" Brian commented, "they like to feed us a lot before making us run twenty klicks and watch us throw it back up." I silently agreed with him on that one. "I hear it has something to do with the new mud field they made last night" Jimmy replied, "and whatever it is the older recruits won't tell us other than it's the closest to warfare we'll get in a while." I considered that statement. For some reason Jimmy was accepted by the older recruits, those that had already spent a year in training. If they had something to say about it then it was most likely true.

We all were at the new obstacle course the "demonic idiots" had set up for us by 0700. All the recruits had given the DI's different words for their acronym. From what I could see it was a large square ditch with a bunch of razor wire going through it and a raised mound of earth on all sides. Really you couldn't see inside of it, just a glimpse of the top. It smelled pretty bad though, just enough to make a few of the recruits nauseous. On both sides were towers where DI's sat and stared at us. Whatever was going to happen it would be very amusing for the DI's, which of course meant that it would be either very painful or excessively horrible for us. I was just oozing with anticipation. Not. The DI explained the course to us rather simply. There were multiple small ridges we would have to crawl over, we would be crawling through mud, and would have to stay under the barbed wire at all times. Seemed pretty simple. As the recruits went by group you could hear the earlier groups throwing up and cries of, "holy shit!" "what the fuck!" and "son of a bitch!" moments after they made it over the first embankment. I just knew that whatever was on the other side was going to be hell.

It was my turn up the ridge, the moment the DI said for me to go I started belly crawling upwards. I got to the top of the hill and immediately rolled down the incredibly steep slope on the other side and landed with a squish into the mud, pulling something off my face as I turned the correct direction. I looked at what it was and nearly threw up. In my hand was an intestine of some sort, still slightly bloody. The blood was even wet. I threw it away and looked up, realizing immediately why I was pulling intestine from my face. The DI's had obviously found a use for the rest of the animals we had eaten just minutes before. There were intestines strewn from the barbed wire, stomachs and heads strewn across the ground, and bones blocking some parts of the course. When I looked down at the mud to see it intermixed with still recognizable bacon bits I couldn't hold it in any more. I threw up. Sure I had seen some pretty nasty wounds when I was with the Sangheili, but the worst was a bone sticking straight out of an arm. Most of the injuries were pretty vicious bruises covering a whole torso or cuts all over a limb given as punishment. I had never seen the insides of a person or animal before. I finished the rest of the course as quickly as possible, the last thing I wanted to do was sit around in the mud and guts for any longer. Obviously the DI's enjoyed the irony of us crawling through the animals we had just eaten. And us giving back the insides of them that we had consumed right back to the insides of the same animals. I could even hear them laughing at us. Bastards.

December 9th, 2096, Separatist controlled planet Coral

For the first time we were going to somewhere in the base by vehicle. Finally. We had spent months running around to wherever we needed to go, so whatever it was it had to be an incredibly important occasion for them to break out the vehicles for us measly recruits. We all

hopped into a couple M-508 Foxes and drove all of fifteen seconds to the firing range. It would have probably taken us a total of a minute to jog there. As it was it took us two to get loaded up into the troop transports. We all hopped out and walked to the beginning of the range, where there was an incredibly long table with at least a hundred guns on it. Behind it were boxes and boxes of ammunition. At the very far end of the range some of the older recruits could be seen shooting at targets, listening to the satisfying pings the bullets made as they hit the target. A few of them stopped what they were doing for a few seconds to stare at us before going back to shooting the alien shaped targets. The DI's all waited for us to line up before handing each of us an unloaded MA-12 rifle. We had all seen it before, 60 round magazine, metal storm firing system, no moving parts. If it broke it was broke for good, no way you could fix it short of an advanced degree in electrical engineering and programming.

We were then told the basics of the gun as if we didn't know them already, fire rate of 3000 rounds per minute if fired on full auto, single shot and three round burst option, pulls up and to the right, 7.62mm ammunition. Every one of us was then handed an empty magazine and shown how to load it. We all then loaded and unloaded the gun multiple times before they were taken away and we were each given a MMR-3, a marksman's rifle. Same thing as the MA-12, we were told the specs, 45 round magazine, 1500 rounds per minute, burst, semi, and full auto options, 12.7mm AM rounds, pulls up and right. Unlike the six barrel configuration of the MA-12 the MMR-3 had only three barrels, but more rounds per barrel. We went through all the infantry weapons that way, the MSG-7 five barreled, 100 rounds, 5mm, 5000 rounds per minute, full or semi auto, up and to the left. The tri-barreled MPD-6, 12.7mm, 15 rounds, semi-auto, one PPR barrel, one SAPHE barrel, and one mixed barrel, firing could be manually adjusted or just pull the trigger enough to empty out everything. The barrels in it could also be fired from a MMR-3 and vice versa, but it wasn't ideal. My personal favorite though was the MRT-2 Gauss Rifle. It fired 16.5mm "Hyper Penetration" or HE rounds. It was semi-automatic, recoilless, and could take out even light armor. The HP rounds were just massive, they were meant to punch through anything in their way, including tank armor. The HP rounds were in a five round magazine, the HE rounds were in a ten round mag. Interestingly enough it used the old fashioned box magazine to hold the rounds. The only noise you heard when it fired was the sound of the bullet instantly going hypersonic. We were even shown how to use rockets, just point, wait for a lock on tone, and shoot.

It took an hour for the DI's to show us every gun type, how to load it, and which end to point at someone you didn't like. According to the DI's aiming was simple, you just pointed, looked down the sights, and pulled the trigger. I was itching to shoot them, I had some practice with guns before, mainly plasma weapons, but these were all new to me, apparently the military had some pretty cool stuff when it came to blowing the bad guys up. Then the DI's said something rather interesting, each headshot was worth five points, each body shot worth two, and each limb shot worth one. I miss would be negative five points. Anyone who scored under one hundred points with each weapon would be missing dinner that night. I had missed dinner before and it was never any fun. We were each given a pistol and told to shoot targets for one hour. I went down to a spot somewhere in the middle of the range and started shooting at the targets closest to me. I was surprised at the recoil. I hadn't shot a 12.7mm before, and

the recoil was rather large, even with the dampeners in the gun. I quickly learned to control it though, and when I needed to reload I just pulled the back of the gun backwards, the top came up a little, and turned the gun sideways to let the spent barrels fall out. I immediately put in a new set of barrels, pulled the top down, and pushed the back in, hearing it lock the barrels into place. I then resumed firing.

All in all I scored the least with the pistol, just a little over two hundred points. It wasn't that accurate, meant mainly as a last resort at close range. The SMG wasn't accurate either, but the fact that it could put multiple rounds every second on a target meant that if you were accurate enough something would be going down. I still liked the sniper though, the immense power it had behind it was just phenomenal. When I checked the points later I saw that I was third overall on the point standings, beat only by Avery Johnson IV, and Jimmy Grant. Nothing surprised me more than Jimmy being the best shot out of all of us. He seemed to jumpy, I figured he would do the worst because in my opinion he would end up flinching every time a gun went off. But apparently whenever he was looking down the sights of a gun he was one cool customer. It really made me feel better possibly fighting with him because if nothing else he could shoot and run better than anyone else in our little company/platoon of recruits. It was kind of sad actually to be leaving the range, for the first time firing those weapons I was feeling like a real soldier. Going back to the mess hall made it feel more like I was still in training, I wasn't actually doing something, wellâ€|soldierly. At least dinner was good. There was pork roast and steak, which probably meant that some of the fresher recruits would end up going through hell tomorrow. Just remembering about it made me come very close my appetite. Very close but not there, it wasn't every month that you got to eat quality food at mess. For me, this was a celebration dinner; a celebration of finally doing something I felt was productive.

Big surprises were in store after the alarm clock got hit with a flying boot and then George got up and turned it off. Instead of the normal morning workout we were immediately ushered to the range and told to shoot. Obviously our overall performance was less than satisfactory. Even over the next two weeks we went out there every day and shot up metal targets. I was actually getting pretty good. I could headshot a grunt shaped target with the pistol from twenty-five meters. It was a change from the usual, but if the DI's wanted us to shoot targets instead of run who was I to complain? Hell, if they wanted us to walk around the base singing "I'm a Little Teapot" I wouldn't complain. By now I'm pretty sure everyone in the base knew how I felt about running. It was becoming rather obvious that Jimmy, Johnson, Brian, George, and of course me were probably either going to be designated marksmen or snipers. It wasn't often that you had marine snipers, those jobs were normally left up to the special forces teams that would be deployed across a battlefield. Instead it was the job of the marines to soak up incoming fire and send ours back with precision. Better than the poor army though, from what I had heard they only had a few months worth of training and inferior secondhand equipment compared to our year and a half training and new or only slightly used weapons and armor. I couldn't wait to get into the fight, the Covenant had killed my parents, from orbit none the less, and I was ready to get up close and personal with them and show them that they had made a huge mistake in messing with humanity. I could envision myself in armor tearing through my enemies like they

were nothing. That would have to wait though, there were still over six months worth of training left and I still had yet to even learn the basics of combat, we hadn't even been in a mock fight yet. There was still some time before I could finally return the favor, but I couldn't wait for it to happen for real.

## 5. A Matter of Survival

\*\*Disclaimer: I own Bungie...Cord\*\*

\*\*Sorry about the long wait, beta just got a chance to edit this chapter, she is swamped with finals. On a side note both my computer and laptop are fried, but there is a local library so I can post this even though I got it in my inbox last night. No computer is no excuse to not posting, it's very easy to find a computer with free internet and a word processor around somewhere. And on to reviews!\*\*

\*\*Prototron MJ Tornada: Yay friends? Sounds like fun! And you liked the mud pit because it almost made you throw up? Didn't know I was \*\*\_\*that\*\_\*\* descriptive. Glad you liked my crap writing anyways though \*\*

\*\*Ramen Knight: Not discouraging me, this is a learning experience. My beta is going off of her knowledge, which for the past two years of her writing in high school has been AP research papers. Which have at least 500 words per paragraph. I picked up my copy of The Fall of Reach and looked at the paragraph length. You are so right about that. Thank you for the help, it's always good to have someone willing to step in and give some criticism where it is obviously needed.\*\*

\*\*Inverness: Yes, paragraph length has been fixed even more, I'll probably eventually go back and do a rewrite later, but for now I'm still in the learning stage. See? Told you my writing was crap.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>We were once again running down the beach. The very same dreaded endless beach that only meant one thing to me by now, running. At lease today we were doing it without our packs or anything on. That made life so much easier. Just last week we had gone through the survival basics and I had to admit I was seeing the world around me a little bit differently. I now noticed it when the brush moved, saw edible plants where there at first was just a bunch of meaningless foliage, and I now knew what to do if I ever got stranded in the wilderness.</p>

We stopped running after only twenty kilometers, we were used to running more than that when we didn't have our packs on, it was rather refreshing actually to have a short run. As we stopped we were told to divide into five equal groups and wait. It took five minutes for a group of five 747's dropped in and picked us up. Each one of us was dropped off in a different part of the forest via the grav lift and told that we would either walk back to the base or be picked up in two weeks.

As I descended through the lift I took stock of the forest around me. The trees were all about fifteen meters tall, with some smaller ones

growing up in holes where once a majestic tree stood. Some areas had dense foliage while other parts were mostly clear, just the trunks of the trees in the way. The birds could be heard singing over the slight hum of the gull lifting back off and flying away, leaving me alone in the forest. I looked up at the afternoon sun and started walking towards it, the base was east and that was the direction I needed to go.

The moment the sun got down low enough for me to not see it above the treetops I got to work finding a shelter of sorts. After about an hour of searching I found a nice little rock overhang and set up camp. I gathered a few small twigs and larger branches and set them up, lighting a fire using the sparks I created from striking the backside of my knife against the rock. I took a promising looking branch and made myself a sharpened stick; it would work well as a walking stick too. I then lay down, covered myself in a bunch of leaves, and went to sleep for the night.

I woke up before the sun, good thing too considering it would get to about 35 degrees, and I didn't need that kind of heat beating down on me. Most importantly I needed to find some water. I hadn't had any since I was dropped off and that would be something critical to my survival. I know there had to be water somewhere considering the fact that there were animals living on the island. I had seen a few small furry creatures jumping all over the trees, there seemed to be small furry animals on every planet. And they were always loud and rather annoying.

I figured if I managed to kill one of them if they would shut up. Probably not though, maybe they would just get mad and make even more noise. Dumb little animals, I have no clue how so many people think that a small furry little thing that will gladly bite you is cute. I picked up a nearby rock and chucked it at one of them. I missed of course but the sound the rock made as it hit the ground was rather rewarding. Or should I say the sound it made as it hit the water.

I quickly jogged to the approximate place where the stone had fallen to find a small little pool of water and a stream about a foot wide that moved off to the south. I bent over, cupping my hands and started drinking. The water felt good going down my dry throat, and I drank as much as I could. That would probably last me for about seven or eight hours before it would be good for me to drink again. I could go a few days without water if it really came down to it but that would not have been optimal. Dehydration was not something I particularly wanted to experience so I filled up my empty canteen.

As I stood back up I noticed that one of the small little furry animals was sitting on the trunk of a tree about three meters away. I slowly took my knife out and grabbed the blade, imagining how the knife would fly in my head, three meters, two revolutions, aim slightly down as that was the way it was facing. I threw the knife only to watch the little think jerk out of the way, run up the tree, and chitter angrily at me. I sighed as a retrieved my knife out of the tree, obviously it would be hard to get some real meat to eat, I would probably have to rely on berries and other greenery.

Right around the time the sun was directly overhead I decided to sit down and have a short rest. In order to make the water I had drunk last longer it was imperative that I rest when the day was at its

hottest. It would probably even be best if I only moved at night, but I really didn't know the constellations of Coral that well. It would be very bad if I got lost. Some parts of the island were restricted for a reason, large carnivorous creatures tended to not like smelly pink bipeds walking in their territory. Scratch that, they probably do like it. I'm sure humans in their opinion are rather tasty.

Knowing I was a decent ways away from most danger, I leaned up against a rock, grateful for the overhang and the shade it provided and started testing a leaf I had found. First I put it on the top of my tongue, then the bottom, and waited for three hours. When nothing happened I bit off a small piece and moved it towards the back of my throat before spitting it out. Another two hours later I got up and started trekking towards the base again. Having no bad reactions to the leaf meant it was safe to eat, so I gathered about fifty of them and started munching.

They were excessively bitter and rather dry but it was better than not eating anything at all. By the time I had finished I was thirsty again so I took a swig from my dwindling water supply. The leaves were a tricky business, if I ate too many my body would reject the chlorophyll and make me throw it all back up, so I couldn't eat that many but I had to eat enough to give me energy. I was on the lookout for any ants too; the little buggers had managed to spread from Earth to every colony, if I found any they would be a great source of protein.

It took more energy than one would expect to walk for six hours over flat terrain. Well six Coral hours, it was a small planet and it rotated rather quickly, producing 1.17 times standard earth gravity. Each coral hour was about forty-three standard Earth minutes. The whole reason that basic training took place on planets like this was because they had short days, leaving the soldier used to a combat situation, where short naps would be taken in intervals. It originally messed with my sleep schedule, as Harvest had been very similar to standard time, with a 23.78 hour day.

By the time I found a decent shelter I was rather tired, I hadn't had as much to eat as would have been optimal and I definitely had been walking for the majority of the day. Sure physical training had gotten me used to running and marching but I still couldn't stay moving for hours on end without feeling tired. I lay down under another nice overhanging rock and passed out for the night, listening to the sounds of the multitude of insects living in the forest/jungle.

Thankfully the annoying as hell alarm clock had gotten me used to waking up just before the sun started cresting the horizon. I stretched and started back on my way again, walking with the sun at my back. It was rather funny in my opinion; Coral was one of four colonized planets that rotated around its sun in the opposite direction. I gathered a few more of the bitter leaves and started on my way, munching them as I went. I noticed that they got harder the warmer they were, the cooler leaves were very soft and actually tasted slightly better. Something weird was with the leaves, but I was no botanist so it was way beyond me why they did that.

Two days later I finally ended up killing one of the stupid little furry things. Two of them were fighting and the unlucky one didn't

notice the knife until it was too late. I skinned it and built a fire, I would finally be having some real meat. I set up a spit of sorts using my sharpened walking stick and two other branches I found and built a fire under it. My mouth was watering just smelling the cooking meat. I knew that in certain animals organs could be deadly, they might contain high amounts of a poisonous substance that their body was used to while mine was not so I only cooked the muscle, a paltry amount really.

The fire sizzled as the grease from it dripped down. I turned it slowly, not wanting to screw up the best meal I had had in days. As soon as it looked nice and done I started to take it off the spit but instead all I managed to do was burn my fingers. Stupid me, I should have known that something coming straight off of a fire would be very hot. But my in my eagerness I stopped thinking about what was smart and only concentrated on the fact that there was cooked meat in front of me, something I hadn't had since that morning when I had eaten mystery meat sausage patties.

It took what felt like an hour to cool but was probably closer to ten minutes. As I started to dig in I heard something that I didn't particularly want to hear, a low pitched growl coming from the forest to my right. I looked over and some movement immediately caught my eye. A large mottled green and brown beastly thing was challenging me over my lunch. I quickly swallowed the piece I had been savoring and looked at it to see if it had any weak spots I might take advantage of. As soon as I started looking I was wishing I hadn't.

It had four visible eyes, most likely giving it excellent vision, a wide mouth with multiple sharp yellow fangs, and four powerful looking legs with extended claws. Thankfully it wasn't more than four feet in length, but it was still obviously a predator and the only thing I had to defend myself with was a knife and a sharpened stick. Hoping to scare it away I stood up as tall as I could and growled back, trying to make myself sound a lot more menacing than what I really was. It narrowed its eyes and flicked a forked tail I hadn't seen before. On the end of each fork was a barb that I didn't want anywhere near me.

I stood my ground, making sure not to do anything to overtly challenge it but that wasn't enough. Obviously this thing had arrived smelling food just to find me, which it must have decided would be a better substitute. No matter what happened though I was going to make sure that I wasn't going to become dinner without a fight. I backed away slowly, the small amount of meat I had was not enough for me to fight something so dangerous over. It narrowed its eyes and continued to growl at me. I made sure to make no sudden movements but that wasn't enough as it leaped straight at me.

I moved as soon as I saw it start to move, diving for my stick and knife which were sitting on the ground only a few meters away. As it passed through the air it flicked its tail at me, missing me by a few centimeters. I grabbed my knife and stood up just in time to throw myself backwards as it took a swipe with its claws for my stomach. I came out of my backwards roll in a crouch, holding my knife out in front of me, ready for it to attack again. It started circling with me, and then suddenly leaped straight at me claws extended. I dropped on my back and kicked at it with my legs, giving it a solid blow to the chest but leaving me with a bloody furrow down my left thigh.

I looked back at it and yelled, trying to scare it away but I only made it angrier and it once again tried to leap at me. This time I held my ground and brought the knife up in front of me to deflect the claws on my right while using my other arm to hit the leg on my left. The knife, which was sharpened to a molecular level sliced straight through hide and muscle, leaving it wounded. My left arm missed the leg and once again I came out with a deep scratch, this one on my side. Blood was staining my fatigues and I knew I did not want to get hit again. Not only because it hurt like hell but also because I didn't want to lose too much blood.

It looked at me, pissed this time as its left foreleg was turned into not much more than a weight. I then lunged at it knife extended but it had learned its lesson and dodged impossibly fast and batted my arm away, leaving four clean holes where its claws had hit my arm. I disengaged and moved over to where I had last placed the stick, being watched warily the whole time. I picked up the stick and jabbed at it again and again just to have my attacks batted away over and over again. It became rather obvious that I would not end up hurting it this way so I came up with a plan that I hoped would work.

I slowly walked backwards until I felt my back bump into a tree. What I had in mind was an age old trick, but it was still iffy whether or not it would work. The only thing I needed was for it to pounce at me but that wasn't guaranteed. Hoping to enrage it I threw my knife at it, which it promptly dodged. This time it actually roared, and leaped at me one last time. I set the stick into the ground and prayed. A surprised yelp came out of the creature as it recognized the trick for what it was but could do nothing about it as it was already in the air. I cringed as it scratched at me one last time and yelled in pain as the tail barbs both left wicked scratches along my stomach.

I got up off the ground from where I had been thrown to see it laying there wheezing with my stick through what must have been one of its lungs. I limped over to my knife and put it out of its misery, if it wasn't for the stick I had I most likely wouldn't have survived. As it was I looked at myself and saw blood coming out of multiple wounds faster than what I personally would have liked. I groaned, the last time I had seen blood pouring out of me this fast I had been cryo frozen and woken up years later. I stumbled and fell on my back, staring up at the sky as darkness crept in on the edge of my vision. Before I passed out I saw the piece of meat that had started the whole thing, stupid furry creature had gone and gotten me killed.

December 13th, 2596, Separatist controlled planet Reach

They were miles underground. It had taken the past eighty years for them to crack the forerunner technology under CASTLE base. More like the basics of it really. The basics on the semisolid holography were still being unraveled and the shard they found that modified space, gravity, and even time itself was still being analyzed. Dr. Tamara Johnson, a relative to the legendary Dr. Halsey never expected to actually understand how the forerunners technology worked, but it had been done. Sadly enough in her opinion ONI was jumping into things and already confiscating some of the research to make weapons for the new war that had managed to start.

New particle acceleration technology, beams of solid light,

incredible ways to generate extreme power, an amazing latticework of materials that were nearly impossible to crack even down to the molecular level, and a wealth of information and knowledge on many things humanity had yet to discover; or better yet from what was to be gathered from the archives, rediscover. So many doors were opened by the cracking of just the basics of forerunner technology. It would now be possible to do so many things that weren't before.

Worlds could now be powered by a single reactor, making the need for nuclear power moot and removing the possible harmful side effects of dealing with nuclear energy. Vehicles and ships could be made out of forerunner materials so that they would be close to indestructible, as not even the strongest weapons could do nothing more than dent forerunner structures. The possibilities were nearly endless; society could be vastly improved by the addition of forerunner technology.

The forerunners were hyper advanced, just contact from machines on the planet Onyx showed them to be unharmed by a direct rocket shot, shields were in fact still operational after one, and they possessed an energy beam capable of melting even the strongest armor almost instantaneously. The scope of the things that could be created using the new technology was unseen by even the greatest of scientists, Dr. Halsey who theorized better than any before her had no idea even of what the forerunners were truly capable of.

They could create a bubble where space and time didn't matter, whole worlds were contained in a space smaller than an atom, the whole extra dimension of slipspace and all its secrets was known to the forerunners. The more Dr. Tamara Johnson thought about it the more she realized just what could be done, and how much regulation would be needed to keep the wrong technology from falling into the wrong hands. Whole worlds could be trapped within a slipspace bubble and then subsequently destroyed. They had the ability to manipulate even time itself but in the hands of a murderer it could be used to kill everyone around them, and theoretically everyone on a planet.

These thoughts had kept her from giving ONI exactly what they wanted, instead she restricted them to using just her notes for their research, ONI wasn't really known for following the rules or playing nice, so she had everything kept from them that she possibly could. Thankfully the UHC government agreed with her and ONI was kept away from the technology with a more destructive aspect, like the notes on forerunner particle acceleration physics and studies on ancient leftover weapons. All she had to give them was information on the forerunner building materials and reactor technologies.

A very irate Vice Admiral Lee Dignam, officer in ONI Section III special projects division left with much less than what he came for, and that suited Dr. Tamara perfectly. For all she cared ONI could go to hell, in her opinion all they did was cause trouble and make weapons so that they could take care of the trouble that they had just caused. A pacifist to the core she saw no military uses that she was particularly happy about so she petitioned for ONI to be shut out of her work completely. While she wasn't completely successful she was able to use her significant standing as the top researcher into new technologies to get the government to give her the treatment she wanted.

Two nights later unknown to anyone but to those in the upper echelons

of ONI the notes of Dr. Tamara Johnson were copied and sent out to multiple scientists to break down and present in an understandable manner. ONI was used to getting what they wanted and when they set their eyes on Dr. Tamara's notes on forerunner technology not even the new "super smart" AI she had as a personal assistant could stop the Beowulf class hacking program ONI had designed just to beat any electronic guardian that got in between them and what they wanted. ONI was like a child that didn't have the toy they wanted, they were willing to steal it from someone else if it meant they would get it.

As soon as they learned the possibilities the technology had in a military application they immediately had it sent off to labs in order to be put into weapons. Particle acceleration could be used to create more reliable, more accurate, and more powerful weapons. The hard light technology could be used to create a more effective blade than even the sangheili plasma swords as they could be created so thin they could almost slice an atom. When it was figured out the time manipulation could be used to augment armor to make the soldiers deadlier by making them faster than anything around them, even giving them the ability to dodge and even knock bullets off course.

Now that ONI had what they wanted they were going to make the biggest baddest military anyone had seen in over a hundred thousand years. Humanity was going to become a force to be reckoned with, and for the most part the technology would be theirs to use wherever they pleased, essentially hopefully giving them the power they needed to control the government that in their opinion got in their way of doing business way too often. While ONI was going to save lives that wasn't what it was all about, instead it was all about power.

End  
file.